DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 176 SP 023 992

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TITLE Wellness: The Concept and the Movement--Relevance for Mental Health and Vice Versa.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association (Los Angeles, CA).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Individual Needs; Interpersonal Competence; *Life Satisfaction; *Locus of Control; *Mental Health; Psychological Characteristics; *Self Actualization; Self Concept; *Well Being
IDENTIFIERS Positive Attitudes

ABSTRACT

"High level wellness...is defined as an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where he is functioning." Expanding upon this quotation from Halbert L. Dunn, the author of this paper discusses the concept of mental wellness. The literature on the topic is briefly synthesized, and 10 characteristics of the mentally well individual are described: (1) being real; (2) being realistic; (3) being able to satisfy one's needs; (4) being free and responsible; (5) being open to experience; (6) being capable of intimate relationships; (7) being tolerant and accepting of others; (8) being capable of reacting in a wide variety of ways; (9) having "joie de vivre"; and (10) having a positive self concept. (JD)

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WELLNESS:
THE CONCEPT AND THE MOVEMENT --
RELEVANCE FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND VICE VERSA

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Invited paper for the session on mental wellness at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, California.

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Let me begin with a quotation we are all familiar with, "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity" (W.H.O., 1947). The critical elements of that quotation are threefold: First, that health is not merely physical but has mental and social aspects of equal importance. Second, that health is a positive quality and not just freedom from illness. Third, it may be implied from the preceding that, just as there are degrees of illness ranging from the subclinical to the terminal, there must be degrees of health ranging from barely discernible health to an ultimate high level of health.

A major movement, some would say a revolution, in health has developed which addresses these positive aspects of health. The Wellness Movement, represented by the journal Health Values: Achieving High Level Wellness and by such leaders as Donald Ardell, John Bruhn and John Travis, has become a major force in our evolving health care system.

The father of the Wellness Movement was Halbert L. Dunn. The holder of an M.D. and a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, Dr. Dunn was a physician, teacher, statistician and health administrator before beginning his fifth career as the world's first high level wellness expert. His distinguished career included teaching positions at the University of Minnesota and Johns Hopkins University; medical practice at the Mayo Clinic; direction of the University of Minnesota's University Hospital; and twenty-five years as Chief of the National Office of Vital Statistics, first under the Bureau of the Census and later under the Public Health Service.

Dr. Dunn (1961) defined his new concept as follows:

> High level wellness ... is defined as an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where he is functioning.

Such a concept is not without precedent in the field of mental health. Efforts to define a positive concept of mental health extend at least as far back as the Thirties' and Burnham's (1932) examination of "the wholesome personality." Two of the most important contributions to the development of a concept of positive mental health have been made by Maslow (1954) in his studies of self-actualization and by Rogers (1961) in his description of the "Fully functioning" person. Also of special

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significance are the attempts by Jahoda (1958) and by Coan (1974) to develop a synthesis of existing knowledge on what Jahoda called "positive mental health" and Coan called 'optimal personality."

WHAT MENTAL WELLNESS IS NOT

Jahoda (1958) argued that we cannot define mental wellness or "positive mental health" in terms of normality nor of absence of symptoms nor of happiness. Normality, she points out, is a statistical concept not an ideal. Normal is whatever state is shared by most of the people in a population at a given time. As H. G. Wells pointed out, in the land of the blind, the sighted man may be thought insane with his 'ravings' about 'seeing' things.

Nor can we define mental wellness on the basis of a lack of symptoms alone. Unhealthy people may not show any symptoms. In mental health as in physical health, wellness must be seen as something more than the mere absence of symptoms of illness.

We cannot expect the mentally healthy individual to be happy all the time. Everyone has ups and downs in their mood. And we all must at times face experiences to which happiness would be an abnormal response.

I would add to these, that mental wellness cannot be defined in terms of "adjustment," "functioning," or never having needed help. The problem with adjustment as a criterion is much the same as with normality. Joining the SS and murdering Jews was a very successful adjustment to society in Nazi Germany but I would not point to it as an example of mental health. Those who refused to adjust to society in Nazi Germany clearly were more likely to have been the mentally well members of that society.

Our society is certainly not so pathological as was Germany under Hitler but is it necessarily healthy to adjust to a society still plagued by widespread poverty, racism, sexism and a runaway arms build-up? Or, on the other hand, hasn't the healthiest adjustment been made by those who are actively rebelling against such elements in our society.

Ability to function is no better criterion. True, mentally healthy people are able to function in all the areas of their lives -- family, work, play, etc.. But ability to function is not exclusive to healthy individuals. Even a psychotic may be able to function after a fashion. A psychopath may not only function but excell in many roles.

Finally, we must not define mental wellness in terms of never

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having needed help with an emotional problem. We wouldn't say that anyone who has ever been treated by a physician cannot be physically well. At its best, mental health care can leave the patient stronger than before. On the other hand, there are many people who have never had any kind of treatment but are certainly not mentally healthy.

WHAT MENTAL WELLNESS IS
(One Man's View)

I will propose ten characteristics of mental wellness. I make no claim either that the following is complete and final nor that I am the first to identify these characteristics. What I am putting before you is an attempted synthesis of the literature. The ten characteristics I would identify are:

1. BEING REAL. The mentally well person responds in a genuine, spontaneous way to events. They aren't pretentious or phony. They say what they mean and feel no need to censor their words or actions. They don't feel any need to plan their words or actions to get approval or to make an impression. They are unselfconsciously themselves in the here and now. This quality of being real is sometimes called authenticity.

2. BEING REALISTIC. Realism means knowing the difference between what is and what ought to be; between what we can change and what we cannot change. The realistic person is capable modifying beliefs in light of new evidence. The mentally well person possesses what St. Francis prayed for -- the strength to accept the things which cannot be changed, the courage to change those which can be, and the wisdom to tell the difference.

3. BEING ABLE TO SATISFY ONE'S NEEDS. Mentally well people recognize their own needs and do what they must to satisfy them. They are not hung up at a primitive level of their need heirarchy, wasting energy on neurotic needs which do not promote personal growth. They are competent -- that is, they know how to satisfy their needs. They are not helpless, nor do they pretend to be.

4. BEING FREE AND RESPONSIBLE. Mentally well people are autonomous. They feel that they are in control of their own lives. They are inner-directed accepting responsibility for their own actions and feelings. They don't blame others for their own actions or feelings.

5. BEING OPEN TO EXPERIENCE. Mentally well individuals accurately, fully experience both their internal and external

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realities. They welcome new experiences and often seek them out, but are not compulsive thrill seekers. Even experiences which brought pain, grief or other unpleasantness are seen by the mentally well person as having potential for personal growth; the unpleasantness is often defused by humor.

6. BEING CAPABLE OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS. In many ways this is an extension of the openness to experience above. The healthy person is open to the risks and the satisfactions of both physical intimacy and emotional intimacy. The ability to give and receive love is basic to healthy human development. Equally basic is the ability to trust in another and to be open in sharing one's feelings. The healthy person's awareness of and pleasure in bodily feelings is not blocked by any neurotic anxieties or phobias. Physical intimacy is a natural and fully enjoyed extension of emotional intimacy with romantic partners for the mentally well person.

7. BEING TOLERANT AND ACCEPTING OF OTHERS. Mental wellness is not compatible with racism, sexism or ageism. A healthy person judges individuals on their own merits and does not expect them to fit within a narrow limit of belief and behavior. It is typical of the mentally well person to be able to like a person while rejecting some part of that person's behavior.

8. BEING CAPABLE OF REACTING IN A WIDE VARIETY OF WAYS. The mentally well person does not react in a stereotyped fashion. The ability to lead is balanced by the ability to follow; the ability to judge, by the ability to empathize; the ability to act, by the ability to yield.

9. HAVING JOIE DE VIVRE. Enjoying life is a major characteristic of mental wellness, in my view. The healthy person enjoys the major elements of life -- family, community, job, etc.. These elements don't have to meet some ideal to be enjoyed; the pleasures of ordinary life are enjoyed fully. On the other hand, the mentally well individiual is not a "Pollyanna" but is able to see the flowers in the swamp.

10. HAVING A POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT. Probably the most critical characteristic of the mentally well personality is a positive self-concept. A deep and confident sense of liking oneself and feeling worthwhile is one of the most universally recognized characteristics of mental health. Most of the above characteristics are predicated on accepting and liking oneself and all are facilitated by a positive self-concept.

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THE RELEVANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH TO WELLNES

So far, I have been addressing the application of the concept of wellness to the field of mental health. Now I would like to briefly address the potential contributions of a mental health perspective to the emerging field of wellness.

Despite the lip service given to the concept that health has physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions, the wellness movement has concerned itself almost exclusively with physical health. Stress has become a common focus for wellness programs but this has largely been due to the relationship between stress and physical illness.

I would like to propose that mental wellness may be the heart of wellness in general. Self-concept, self-responsibility, competence, realism, etc. are obviously keys to wellness. Whether we will live longer, healthier happier lives if we jog and eschew processed foods is strictly a matter of speculation. But we know that social supports are the best predictor of longevity.

Wellness is a matter of quality of life. Our appreciation of, and in many ways the very nature of, the quality of our lives is more mental than physical. Wellness programs which ignore the mental dimension of wellness are unholistic in the extreme -- they disregard not only a major part of the person but the very part that makes us a person.

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